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The Military Situation in the Ukraine—An Update

April 11, 2022 Jacques Baud

The Operational Situation

As of March 25, 2022, our analysis of the situation confirms the observations and conclusions made in mid-March.

The offensive launched on February 24 is articulated in two lines of effort, in accordance with Russian operational doctrine:

1) A main effort directed toward the south of the country, in the Donbass region, and along the Azov Sea coast. As the doctrine states, the main objectives are—the neutralization of the Ukrainian armed forces (the objective of “demilitarization”), and the neutralization of ultra-nationalist, paramilitary militias in the cities of Kharkov and Mariupol (the objective of “denazification”). This primary push is being led by a coalition of forces: through Kharkov and Crimea are Russian forces from the Southern Military District; in the center are militia forces from the Donetsk and Lugansk republics; the Chechen National Guard is contributing with engagement in the urban area of Mariupol;

2) A secondary effort on Kiev, aimed at “pinning down” Ukrainian (and Western) forces, so as to prevent them from carrying out operations against the main thrust or even taking Russian coalition forces from the rear.

This offensive follows, to the letter, the objectives defined by Vladimir Putin on February 24. But, listening only to their own bias, Western “experts” and politicians have gotten it into their heads that Russia’s objective is to take over the Ukraine and overthrow its government. Applying a very Western logic, they see Kiev as the “center of gravity” (*Schwerpunkt*) of Ukrainian forces. According to Clausewitz, the “center of gravity” is the element from which a belligerent derives his strength and ability to act, and is therefore the primary objective of an adversary’s strategy. This is why Westerners have systematically tried to take control of capitals in the wars they have fought. Trained and advised by NATO experts, the Ukrainian General Staff has, predictably enough, applied the same logic, focusing on strengthening the defense of Kiev and its surroundings, while leaving its troops helpless in the Donbass, along the axis of the main Russian effort.

If one had listened carefully to Vladimir Putin, one would have realized that the strategic objective of the Russian coalition is not to take over the Ukraine, but to remove any threat to the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass. According to this general objective, the “real” center of gravity that the Russian coalition is trying to target is the bulk of the Ukrainian armed forces massed in the south-southeast of the country (since the end of 2021), and not Kiev.

Russian Success or Failure?

Convinced that the Russian offensive is aimed at Kiev, Western experts have quite logically concluded that (a) the Russians are stalling, and that (b) their offensive is doomed to failure because they will not be able to hold the country in the long term. The generals who have followed each other on French TV seem to have forgotten what even a second lieutenant comprehends well: “Know your enemy!”—

not as one would like him to be, but as he is. With generals like that, we don't need an enemy anymore.

That being said, the Western narrative about a Russian offensive that is bogged down, and whose successes are meager, is also part of the propaganda war waged by both sides. For example, the sequence of maps of operations, published by *Libération* from the end of February, shows almost no difference from one day to the next, until March 18th (when the media stopped updating it). Thus, on February 23rd, on France 5 [TV station], the journalist Élise Vincent evaluated the territory taken by the Russian coalition as the equivalent of Switzerland or the Netherlands. In reality, we are more in the area of Great Britain.

As an example, let us observe the difference between the map of the situation on March 25, 2022, as published by *Ouest-France*:

La situation au vendredi 25 mars



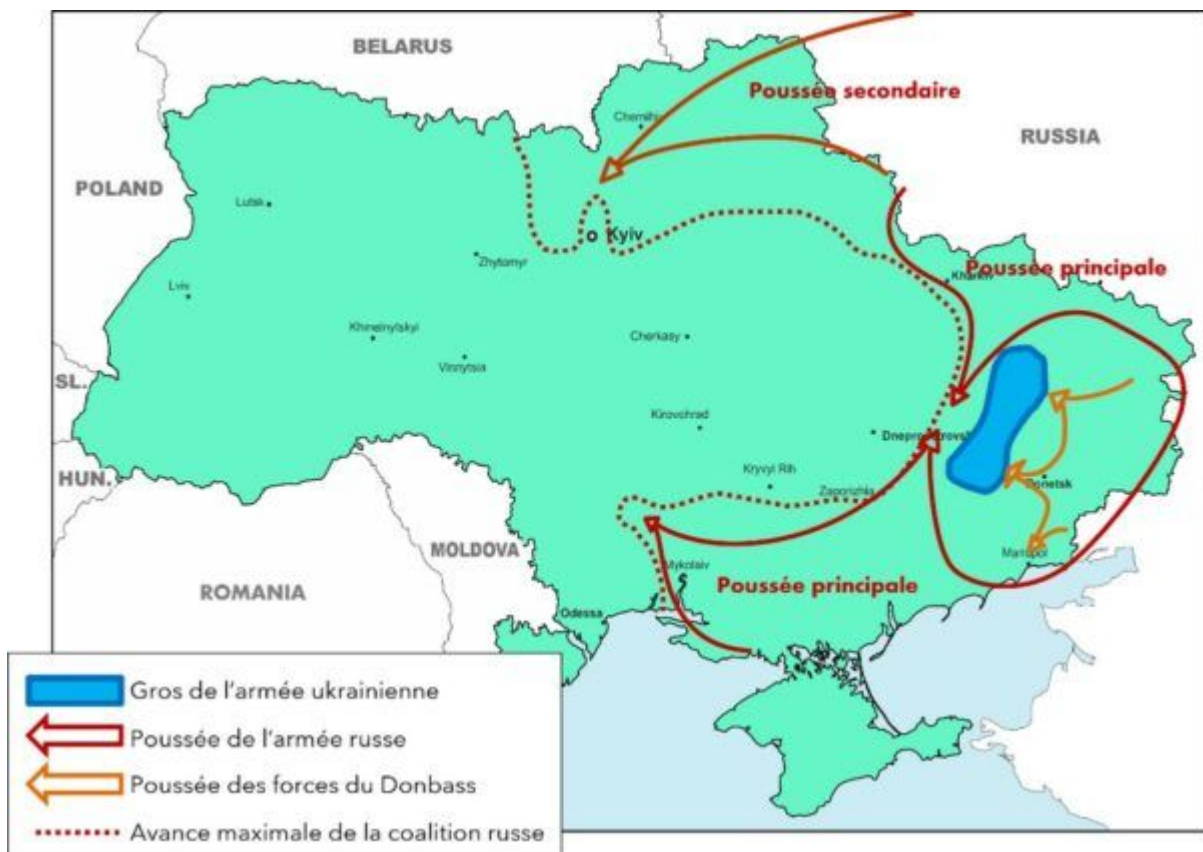
... and as published by the French Ministry of the Armed Forces:



Situation Ukraine au 25 mars - © Ministère des armées

In addition, it should be noted that Ukrainian forces do not appear on any map (presented in our media) of the conflict-situation. Thus, if the map of the French Ministry of Armed Forces gives a slightly more honest picture of reality, it also carefully avoids mentioning the Ukrainian forces encircled in the Kramatorsk cauldron.

In fact, the situational map, as of March 25, should look more like this:



The Situation as of March 25, 2022. [*“Poussée principale”= main thrust;*

“poussée secondaire”= secondary thrust]. The bone-shaped, blue area marks the location of the mass of the Ukrainian army (in reality, this “massed” Ukrainian army is split into several smaller cauldrons). The red-lined arrows show the overall offensive of the Russian army. The orange-lined arrows show the thrust of the Donbass forces. The red dotted line shows the maximum advance of Russian coalition forces.

Moreover, Ukrainian forces are never indicated on our maps, as this would show that they were not deployed on the Russian border in February 2022, but were regrouped in the south of the country, in preparation for their offensive, the initial phase of which began on February 16th. This confirms that Russia was only reacting to a situation initiated by the West, by way of the Ukraine, as we shall see. At present, it is these forces that are encircled in the Kramatorsk cauldron and are being methodically fragmented and neutralized, little by little, in an incremental way, by the Russian coalition.

The vagueness maintained in the West about the situation of the Ukrainian forces, has other effects. First, it maintains the illusion of a possible Ukrainian victory. Thus, instead of encouraging a negotiation process, the West seeks to prolong the war. This is why the European Union and some of its member countries have sent weapons and are encouraging the civilian population and volunteers of all kinds to go and fight, often without training and without any real command structure—with deadly consequences.

We know that in a conflict, each party tends to inform in order to give a favorable image of its actions. However, the image we have of the situation and of the Ukrainian forces is based exclusively on data provided by Kiev. It masks the profound deficiencies of the Ukrainian leadership, even though it was trained and advised by NATO military.

Thus, military logic would have the forces caught in the Kramatorsk cauldron withdraw to a line at the Dnieper, for example, in order to regroup and conduct a counteroffensive. But they were forbidden to withdraw by President Zelensky. Even back in 2014 and 2015, a close examination of the operations showed that the Ukrainians were applying “Western-style” schemes, totally unsuited to the circumstances, and in the face of a more imaginative, more flexible opponent who possessed lighter leadership structures. It is the same phenomenon today.

In the end, the partial view of the battlefield given to us by our media has made it impossible for the West to help the Ukrainian general staff make the right decisions. And it has led the West to believe that the obvious strategic objective is Kiev; that “demilitarization” is aimed at the Ukraine’s membership in NATO; and

that “denazification” is aimed at toppling Zelensky. This legend was fueled by Vladimir Putin’s appeal to the Ukrainian military to disobey, which was interpreted (with great imagination and bias) as a call to overthrow the government. However, this appeal was aimed at the Ukrainian forces deployed in the Donbass to surrender without fighting. The Western interpretation caused the Ukrainian government to misjudge Russian objectives and misuse its potential of winning.

You don’t win a war with bias—you lose it. And that’s what is happening. Thus, the Russian coalition was never “on the run” or “stopped” by heroic resistance—it simply did not attack where it was expected. We did not want to listen to what Vladimir Putin had explained to us very clearly. This is why the West has thus become—*volens nolens*—the main architect of the Ukrainian defeat that is taking shape. Paradoxically, it is probably because of our self-proclaimed “experts” and recreational strategists on our television sets that the Ukraine is in this situation today.

The Conduct of Battle

As for the course of operations, the analyses presented in our media come most often from politicians or so-called military experts, who relay Ukrainian propaganda.

Let’s be clear. A war, whatever else it is, is drama. The problem here is that our strategists in neckties are clearly trying to overdramatize the situation in order to *exclude any negotiated solution*. This development, however, is prompting some Western military personnel to speak out and offer a more nuanced judgment. Thus, in *Newsweek*, an analyst from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the American equivalent of the Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM) in France, noted that “in 24 days of conflict, Russia has carried out some 1,400 strikes and launched nearly 1,000 missiles (by way of comparison, the United States carried out more strikes and launched more missiles on the first day of the Iraq war in 2003).”

While the West likes to “soften up” the battlefield with intensive and prolonged strikes, before sending in ground-troops, the Russians prefer a less destructive, but more troop-intensive approach. On France 5, the journalist Mélanie Tarvant presented the death of Russian generals on the battlefield as proof of the destabilization of the Russian army. But this is a profound misunderstanding of the traditions and modes of operation of the Russian army. Whereas in the West, commanders tend to lead from the rear, their Russian counterparts tend to lead from the front—in the West they say, “Forward!” In Russia, they say, “Follow me!” This explains the high losses in the upper echelons of command, already observed in Afghanistan—but it also tells of the much more rigorous selection of staff-personnel than in the West.

Furthermore, the DIA analyst noted that “the vast majority of the airstrikes are over the battlefield, with Russian aircraft providing ‘close air support’ to ground forces. The remainder—less than 20 percent, according to U.S. experts—has been aimed at military airfields, barracks and supporting depots.” Thus, the phrase “indiscriminate bombing [that] is devastating cities and killing everyone” echoed by the Western media seems to contradict the U.S. intelligence expert, who said, “If we merely convince ourselves that Russia is bombing indiscriminately, or [that] it is failing to inflict more harm because its personnel are not up to the task or because it is technically inept, then we are not seeing the real conflict.”

In fact, Russian operations differ fundamentally from the Western concept of the same. The West’s obsession with having no fatalities in their own forces leads them to operations that are primarily in the form of very lethal air strikes. Ground troops only intervene when everything has been destroyed. This is why, in Afghanistan or in the Sahel, Westerners killed more civilians than terrorists did. This is why Western countries engaged in Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa no longer publish the number of civilian casualties caused by their strikes. In fact, Europeans engaged in regions that only marginally affect their national security, such as the Estonians in the Sahel, go there just to “get their feet wet.”

In the Ukraine, the situation is very different. One only has to look at a map of linguistic zones to see that the Russian coalition operates almost exclusively in the Russian-speaking zone; thus, among populations that are generally favorable to it. This also explains the statements of a US Air Force officer: “I know that the news keeps repeating that Putin is targeting civilians, but there is no evidence that Russia is intentionally doing so.”

Conversely, it is for the same reason—but in a different way—that the Ukraine has deployed its ultra-nationalist paramilitary fighters in major cities, such as Mariupol or Kharkov—without emotional or cultural ties to the local population, these militias can fight even at the cost of heavy civilian casualties. The atrocities that are currently being uncovered remain hidden by the French-speaking media, for fear of losing support for the Ukraine, as noted by media close to the Republicans in the United States.

After “decapitation” strikes in the first minutes of the offensive, the Russian operational strategy was to bypass the urban centers, and to envelop the Ukrainian army, “pinned down” by the forces of the Donbass republics. It is important to remember that the “decapitation” is not intended to annihilate the general staff or the government (as our “experts” tend to understand it), but to sunder the leadership structures so as to prevent the coordinated maneuver of forces. On the contrary, the aim is to preserve the leadership structures themselves in order to be able to negotiate a way out of the crisis.

On March 25, 2022, after having sealed the cauldron of Kramatorsk which denied any possibility of retreat to the Ukrainians and having taken most of the cities of Kharkov and Marioupol, Russia has practically fulfilled its objectives—all that remains is to concentrate its efforts on reducing the pockets of resistance. Thus, contrary to what the Western press has claimed, this is not a reorientation or a resizing of its offensive, but the methodical implementation of the objectives announced on February 24.

The Role of the Volunteers

A particularly disturbing aspect of this conflict is the attitude of European governments that allow or encourage their citizens to go and fight in the Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky's call to join the International Legion for the Territorial Defense of Ukraine, which he recently created, has been greeted with enthusiasm by European countries.

Encouraged by the media that present a routed Russian army, many of these young people head off, imagining they are going—literally—on a hunting trip. However, once there, disillusionment is high. Testimonies show that these “amateurs” often end up as “cannon fodder,” without having any real impact on the outcome of the conflict. The experience of recent conflicts shows that the arrival of foreign fighters brings nothing to a conflict, except to increase its duration and lethality.

Moreover, the arrival of several hundred Islamist fighters from the Idlib region, an area under the control and protection of the Western coalition in Syria (and also the area in which two Islamic State leaders were killed by the Americans) should arouse our concern. Indeed, the weapons we are very liberally supplying to the Ukraine are already partly in the hands of criminal individuals and organizations and are already beginning to pose a security problem for the authorities in Kiev. Not to mention the fact that the weapons that are being touted as effective against Russian aircraft could eventually threaten our military and civilian aircraft.

The volunteer proudly presented by the RTBF on the 7:30 p.m. news of March 8, 2022 was an admirer of the “Corps Franc Wallonie,” Belgian volunteers who served the Third Reich; and he illustrates the type of people attracted to the Ukraine. In the end, we will have to ask ourselves, who gained the most—[in this case] Belgium or the Ukraine?

Distributing weapons indiscriminately could well make the EU—*volens nolens*—a supporter of extremism and even international terrorism. The result—we are adding misery to misery, in order to satisfy the European elites more than the Ukraine itself.

Three Points Deserve to be Highlighted by Way of Conclusion

1. Western Intelligence, Ignored by Policymakers

Military documents found in Ukrainian headquarters in the south of the country confirm that the Ukraine was preparing to attack the Donbass; and that the firing observed by OSCE observers as early as February 16 heralded an imminent outbreak in days or weeks.

Here, some introspection is necessary for the West—either its intelligence services did not see what was happening and they are thus very bad, or the political decision-makers chose not to listen to them. We know that Russian intelligence services have far superior analytical capabilities than their Western counterparts. We also know that the American and German intelligence services had very well understood the situation, since the end of 2021, and knew that the Ukraine was preparing to attack the Donbass.

This allows us to deduce that the American and European political leaders deliberately pushed the Ukraine into a conflict that they knew was lost in advance—for the sole purpose of dealing a political blow to Russia.

The reason Zelensky did not deploy his forces to the Russian border, and repeatedly stated that his large neighbor would not attack him, was presumably because he thought he was relying on Western deterrence. This is what he told CNN on March 20th—he was clearly told that the Ukraine would not be part of NATO, but that publicly they would say the opposite. The Ukraine was thus instrumentalized to affect Russia. The objective was the closure of the North Stream 2 gas pipeline, announced on February 8th, by Joe Biden, during the visit of Olaf Scholz; and which was followed by a barrage of sanctions.

2. Broken Diplomacy

Clearly, since the end of 2021, no effort has been made by the West to reactivate the Minsk agreements, as evidenced by the reports of visits and telephone conversations, notably between Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin. However, France, as guarantor of the Minsk Agreements, and as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has not respected its commitments, which has led to the situation that the Ukraine is experiencing today. There is even a feeling that the West has sought to add fuel to the fire since 2014.

Thus, Vladimir Putin's placing of nuclear forces on alert on February 27 was presented by our media and politicians as an irrational act or blackmail. What is forgotten is that it followed the thinly veiled threat made by Jean-Yves Le Drian, three days earlier, that NATO could use nuclear weapons. It is very likely that Putin did not take this "threat" seriously, but wanted to push Western countries—and France in particular—to abandon the use of excessive language.

3. The Vulnerability of Europeans to Manipulation is Increasing

Today, the perception propagated by our media is that the Russian offensive has broken down; that Vladimir Putin is crazy, irrational and therefore ready to do anything to break the deadlock in which he supposedly finds himself. In this totally emotional context, the question asked by Republican Senator Marco Rubio during Victoria Nuland's hearing before Congress was strange, to say the least: "If there is a biological or chemical weapon incident or attack inside the Ukraine, is there any doubt in your mind that 100% it would be the Russians behind it?" Naturally, she answered that there is no doubt. Yet there is absolutely no indication that the Russians are using such weapons. Besides, the Russians finished destroying their stockpiles in 2017, while the Americans have not yet destroyed theirs.

Perhaps this means nothing. But in the current atmosphere, all the conditions are now met for an incident to happen that would push the West to become more involved, in some form, in the Ukrainian conflict (a "false-flag" incident).

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This article appears through the gracious courtesy of Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement, Paris. Translated from the French by N. Dass.

Featured image: "Medal in Khankala," by I.S. Araslanov; painted in 2007. (Photo Credit: Moscow Museum of Modern Art).



The Military Situation In The Ukraine

April 1, 2022 Jacques Baud

Part One: The Road To War

For years, from Mali to Afghanistan, I have worked for peace and risked my life for it. It is therefore not a question of justifying war, but of understanding what led us to it. I notice that the “experts” who take turns on television analyze the situation on the basis of dubious information, most often hypotheses erected as facts—and then we no longer manage to understand what is happening. This is how panics are created.

The problem is not so much to know who is right in this conflict, but to question the way our leaders make their decisions.

Let's try to examine the roots of the conflict. It starts with those who for the last eight years have been talking about “separatists” or “independentists” from Donbass. This is not true. The referendums conducted by the two self-proclaimed Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk in May 2014, were not referendums of “independence” (независимость), as some unscrupulous journalists have claimed, but referendums of “self-determination” or “autonomy” (самостоятельность). The qualifier “pro-Russian” suggests that Russia was a party to the conflict, which was not the case, and the term “Russian speakers” would have been more honest. Moreover, these referendums were conducted against the advice of Vladimir Putin.

In fact, these Republics were not seeking to separate from Ukraine, but to have a status of autonomy, guaranteeing them the use of the Russian language as an official language. For the first legislative act of the new government resulting from the overthrow of President Yanukovich, was the abolition, on February 23, 2014, of the Kivalov-Kolesnichenko law of 2012 that made Russian an official language. A bit like if putschists decided that French and Italian would no longer be official languages in Switzerland.

This decision caused a storm in the Russian-speaking population. The result was a fierce repression against the Russian-speaking regions (Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Lugansk and Donetsk) which was carried out beginning in February 2014 and led to a militarization of the situation and some massacres (in Odessa and Marioupol, for the most notable). At the end of summer 2014, only the self-proclaimed Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk remained.

At this stage, too rigid and engrossed in a doctrinaire approach to the art of operations, the Ukrainian general staff subdued the enemy without managing to prevail. The examination of the course of the fighting in 2014-2016 in the Donbass shows that the Ukrainian general staff systematically and mechanically applied the same operative schemes. However, the war waged by the autonomists was very similar to what we observed in the Sahel: highly mobile operations conducted with light means. With a more flexible and less doctrinaire approach, the rebels were able to exploit the inertia of Ukrainian forces to repeatedly “trap” them.

In 2014, when I was at NATO, I was responsible for the fight against the proliferation of small arms, and we were trying to detect Russian arms deliveries to the rebels, to see if Moscow was involved. The information we received then came almost entirely from Polish intelligence services and did not “fit” with the information coming from the OSCE—despite rather crude allegations, there were no deliveries of weapons and military equipment from Russia.

The rebels were armed thanks to the defection of Russian-speaking Ukrainian units that went over to the rebel side. As Ukrainian failures continued, tank, artillery and anti-aircraft battalions swelled the ranks of the autonomists. This is what pushed the Ukrainians to commit to the Minsk Agreements.

But just after signing the Minsk 1 Agreements, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko launched a massive anti-terrorist operation (АТО/Антитерористична операція) against the Donbass. *Bis repetita placent*: poorly advised by NATO officers, the Ukrainians suffered a crushing defeat in Debaltsevo, which forced them to engage in the Minsk 2 Agreements.

It is essential to recall here that Minsk 1 (September 2014) and Minsk 2 (February 2015) Agreements did not provide for the separation or independence of the Republics, but their autonomy within the framework of Ukraine. Those who have read the Agreements (there are very, very, very few of those who actually have) will note that it is written in all letters that the status of the Republics was to be negotiated between Kiev and the representatives of the Republics, for an internal solution to the Ukraine.

That is why since 2014, Russia has systematically demanded their implementation while refusing to be a party to the negotiations, because it was an internal matter of the Ukraine. On the other side, the West—led by France—systematically tried to replace the Minsk Agreements with the “Normandy format,” which put Russians and Ukrainians face-to-face. However, let us remember that there were never any Russian troops in the Donbass before 23-24 February 2022. Moreover, OSCE observers have never observed the slightest trace of Russian units operating in the Donbass. For example, the U.S. intelligence map published by the *Washington Post* on December 3, 2021 does not show Russian troops in the Donbass.

In October 2015, Vasyl Hrytsak, director of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), confessed that only 56 Russian fighters had been observed in the Donbass. This was exactly comparable to the Swiss who went to fight in Bosnia on weekends, in the 1990s, or the French who go to fight in the Ukraine today.

The Ukrainian army was then in a deplorable state. In October 2018, after four years of war, the chief Ukrainian military prosecutor, Anatoly Matios, stated that Ukraine had lost 2,700 men in the Donbass: 891 from illnesses, 318 from road accidents, 177 from other accidents, 175 from poisonings (alcohol, drugs), 172 from

careless handling of weapons, 101 from breaches of security regulations, 228 from murders and 615 from suicides.

In fact, the army was undermined by the corruption of its cadres and no longer enjoyed the support of the population. According to a British Home Office report, in the March/April 2014 recall of reservists, 70 percent did not show up for the first session, 80 percent for the second, 90 percent for the third, and 95 percent for the fourth. In October/November 2017, 70% of conscripts did not show up for the “Fall 2017” recall campaign. This is not counting suicides and desertions (often over to the autonomists), which reached up to 30 percent of the workforce in the ATO area. Young Ukrainians refused to go and fight in the Donbass and preferred emigration, which also explains, at least partially, the demographic deficit of the country.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense then turned to NATO to help make its armed forces more “attractive.” Having already worked on similar projects within the framework of the United Nations, I was asked by NATO to participate in a program to restore the image of the Ukrainian armed forces. But this is a long-term process and the Ukrainians wanted to move quickly.

So, to compensate for the lack of soldiers, the Ukrainian government resorted to paramilitary militias. They are essentially composed of foreign mercenaries, often extreme right-wing militants. In 2020, they constituted about 40 percent of the Ukrainian forces and numbered about 102,000 men, according to Reuters. They were armed, financed and trained by the United States, Great Britain, Canada and France. There were more than 19 nationalities—including Swiss.

Western countries have thus clearly created and supported Ukrainian far-right militias. In October 2021, the *Jerusalem Post* sounded the alarm by denouncing the Centuria project. These militias had been operating in the Donbass since 2014, with Western support. Even if one can argue about the term “Nazi,” the fact remains that these militias are violent, convey a nauseating ideology and are virulently anti-Semitic. Their anti-Semitism is more cultural than political, which is why the term “Nazi” is not really appropriate. Their hatred of the Jew stems from the great famines of the 1920s and 1930s in the Ukraine, resulting from Stalin’s confiscation of crops to finance the modernization of the Red Army. This genocide—known in the Ukraine as the Holodomor—was perpetrated by the NKVD (the forerunner of the KGB), whose upper echelons of leadership were mainly composed of Jews. This is why, today, Ukrainian extremists are asking Israel to apologize for the crimes of communism, as the *Jerusalem Post* notes. This is a far cry from Vladimir Putin’s “rewriting of history.”

These militias, originating from the far-right groups that animated the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, are composed of fanatical and brutal individuals. The best known of these is the Azov Regiment, whose emblem is reminiscent of the

2nd SS Das Reich Panzer Division, which is revered in the Ukraine for liberating Kharkov from the Soviets in 1943, before carrying out the 1944 Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in France.

Among the famous figures of the Azov regiment was the opponent Roman Protassevitch, arrested in 2021 by the Belarusian authorities following the case of RyanAir flight FR4978. On May 23, 2021, the deliberate hijacking of an airliner by a MiG-29—supposedly with Putin’s approval—was mentioned as a reason for arresting Protassevich, although the information available at the time did not confirm this scenario at all.

But then it was necessary to show that President Lukashenko was a thug and Protassevich a “journalist” who loved democracy. However, a rather revealing investigation produced by an American NGO in 2020 highlighted Protassevitch’s far-right militant activities. The Western conspiracy movement then started, and unscrupulous media “air-brushed” his biography. Finally, in January 2022, the ICAO report was published and showed that despite some procedural errors, Belarus acted in accordance with the rules in force and that the MiG-29 took off 15 minutes after the RyanAir pilot decided to land in Minsk. So no Belarusian plot and even less Putin. Ah!... Another detail: Protassevitch, cruelly tortured by the Belarusian police, was now free. Those who would like to correspond with him, can go on his Twitter account.

The characterization of the Ukrainian paramilitaries as “Nazis” or “neo-Nazis” is considered Russian propaganda. Perhaps. But that’s not the view of the *Times of Israel*, the Simon Wiesenthal Center or the West Point Academy’s Center for Counterterrorism. But that’s still debatable, because in 2014, *Newsweek* magazine seemed to associate them more with... the Islamic State. Take your pick!

So, the West supported and continued to arm militias that have been guilty of numerous crimes against civilian populations since 2014: rape, torture and massacres. But while the Swiss government has been very quick to take sanctions against Russia, it has not adopted any against the Ukraine, which has been massacring its own population since 2014. In fact, those who defend human rights in the Ukraine have long condemned the actions of these groups, but have not been supported by our governments. Because, in reality, we are not trying to help the Ukraine, but to fight Russia.

The integration of these paramilitary forces into the National Guard was not at all accompanied by a “denazification,” as some claim. Among the many examples, that of the Azov Regiment’s insignia is instructive:



In 2022, very schematically, the Ukrainian armed forces fighting the Russian offensive were organized as:

- The Army, subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. It is organized into 3 army corps and composed of maneuver formations (tanks, heavy artillery, missiles, etc.).
- The National Guard, which depends on the Ministry of the Interior and is organized into 5 territorial commands.

The National Guard is therefore a territorial defense force that is not part of the Ukrainian army. It includes paramilitary militias, called “volunteer battalions” (добровольчі батальйони), also known by the evocative name of “reprisal battalions,” and composed of infantry. Primarily trained for urban combat, they now defend cities such as Kharkov, Mariupol, Odessa, Kiev, etc.

Part Two: The War

As a former head of the Warsaw Pact forces in the Swiss strategic intelligence service, I observe with sadness—but not astonishment—that our services are no longer able to understand the military situation in Ukraine. The self-proclaimed “experts” who parade on our screens tirelessly relay the same information modulated by the claim that Russia—and Vladimir Putin—is irrational. Let’s take a step back.

1. The Outbreak Of War

Since November 2021, the Americans have been constantly threatening a Russian invasion of the Ukraine. However, the Ukrainians did not seem to agree. Why not?

We have to go back to March 24, 2021. On that day, Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree for the recapture of the Crimea, and began to deploy his forces to the south of the country. At the same time, several NATO exercises were conducted between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, accompanied by a significant increase in reconnaissance flights along the Russian border. Russia then conducted several exercises to test the operational readiness of its troops and to show that it was following the evolution of the situation.

Things calmed down until October-November with the end of the ZAPAD 21 exercises, whose troop movements were interpreted as a reinforcement for an offensive against the Ukraine. However, even the Ukrainian authorities refuted the idea of Russian preparations for a war, and Oleksiy Reznikov, Ukrainian Minister of Defense, states that there had been no change on its border since the spring.

In violation of the Minsk Agreements, the Ukraine was conducting air operations in Donbass using drones, including at least one strike against a fuel depot in Donetsk in October 2021. The American press noted this, but not the Europeans; and no one condemned these violations.

In February 2022, events were precipitated. On February 7, during his visit to Moscow, Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed to Vladimir Putin his commitment to the Minsk Agreements, a commitment he would repeat after his meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky the next day. But on February 11, in Berlin, after nine hours of work, the meeting of political advisors of the leaders of the “Normandy format” ended, without any concrete result: the Ukrainians still refused to apply the Minsk Agreements, apparently under pressure from the United States. Vladimir Putin noted that Macron had made empty promises and that the West was not ready to enforce the agreements, as it had been doing for eight years.

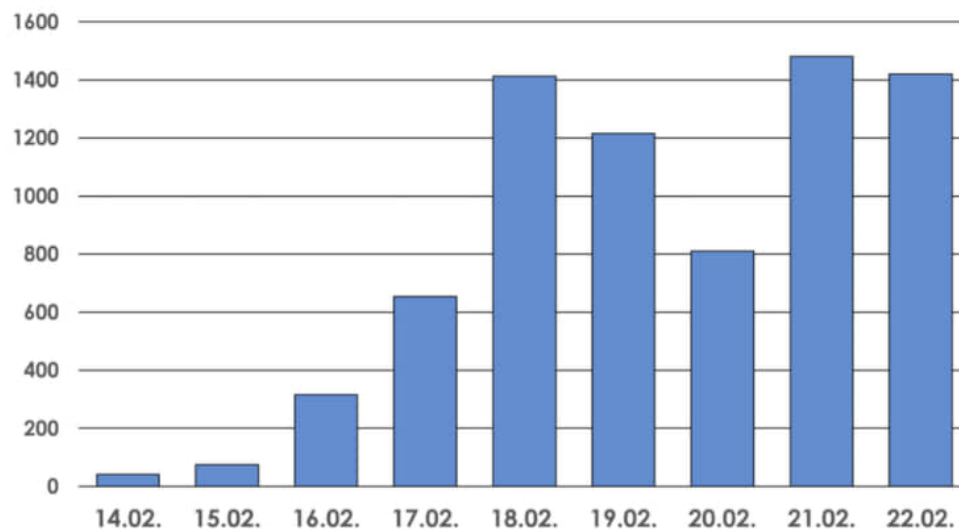
Ukrainian preparations in the contact zone continued. The Russian Parliament became alarmed; and on February 15 asked Vladimir Putin to recognize the independence of the Republics, which he refused to do.

On 17 February, President Joe Biden announced that Russia would attack the Ukraine in the next few days. How did he know this? It is a mystery. But since the 16th, the artillery shelling of the population of Donbass increased dramatically, as the daily reports of the OSCE observers show. Naturally, neither the media, nor the European Union, nor NATO, nor any Western government reacts or intervenes. It will be said later that this is Russian disinformation. In fact, it seems that the European Union and some countries have deliberately kept silent about the massacre of the Donbass population, knowing that this would provoke a Russian intervention.

At the same time, there were reports of sabotage in the Donbass. On 18 January, Donbass fighters intercepted saboteurs, who spoke Polish and were equipped with

Western equipment and who were seeking to create chemical incidents in Gorlivka. They could have been CIA mercenaries, led or “advised” by Americans and composed of Ukrainian or European fighters, to carry out sabotage actions in the Donbass Republics.

Number of Explosions in Donbass (19-20 February 2022)



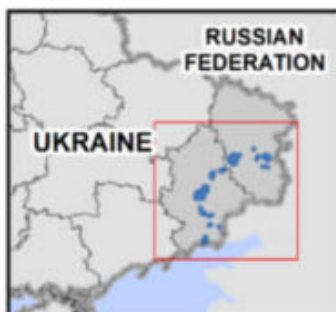
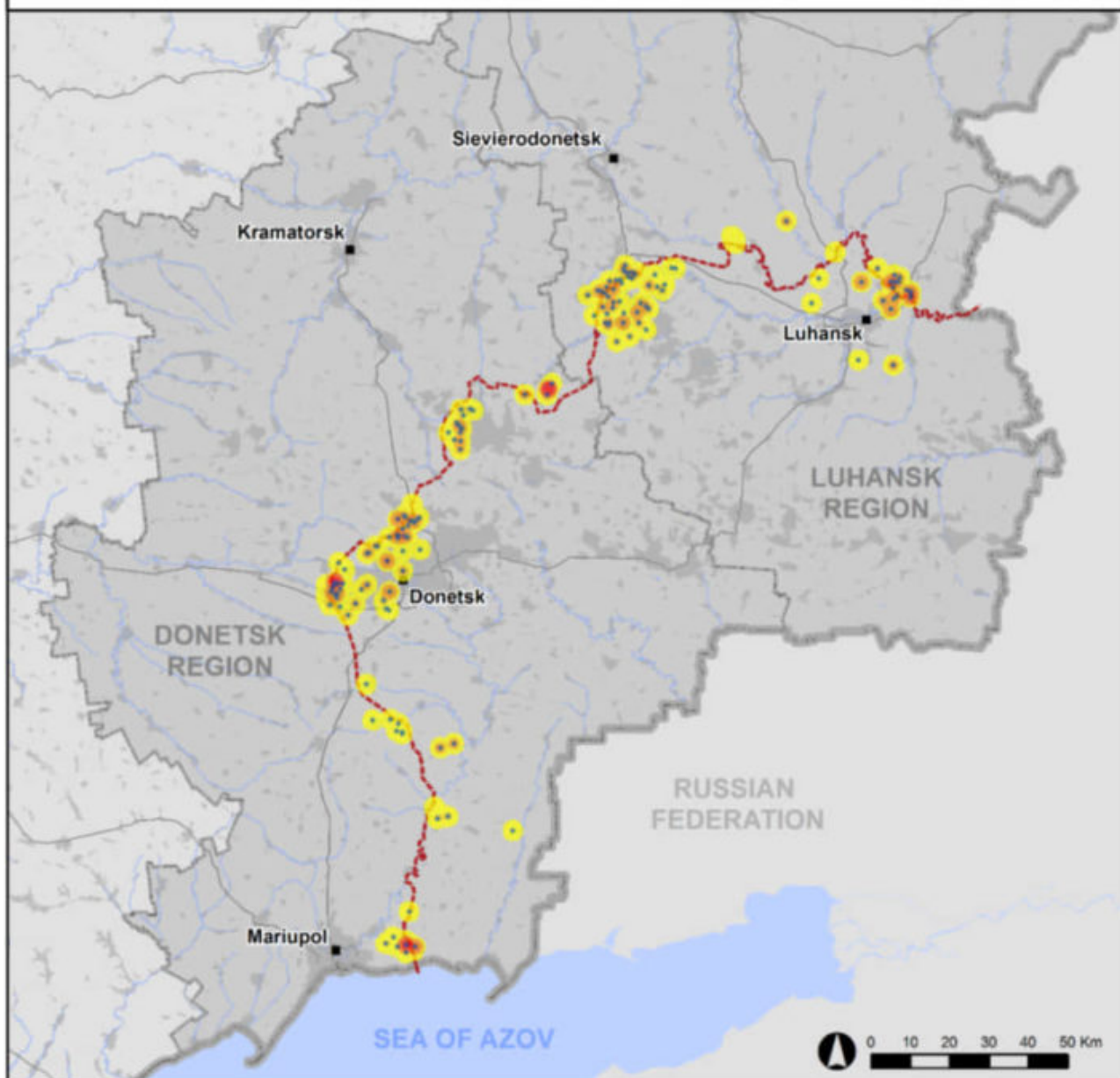
The massive increase in shelling against the population of Donbass on February 16 told the Russians that a major offensive was imminent. This is what led Putin to recognize the independence of the Republics and to consider an intervention under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

(Source: OSCE SMM Daily Reports)



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

Ceasefire violations observed by the SMM 19-20 February 2022



Ceasefire violation concentration



- Explosion
- Settlement
- Estimated line of contact

Sources: Administrative Boundaries - OCHA; Roads, Rivers - OpenStreetMap; Sea - VLIZ (2005). IHO Sea Areas; Other - OSCE.

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 37N

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Created: 20/02/2022

In fact, as early as February 16, Joe Biden knew that the Ukrainians had begun shelling the civilian population of Donbass, putting Vladimir Putin in front of a difficult choice: to help Donbass militarily and create an international problem, or to stand by and watch the Russian-speaking people of Donbass being crushed.

If he decided to intervene, Putin could invoke the international obligation of “Responsibility To Protect” (R2P). But he knew that whatever its nature or scale, the intervention would trigger a storm of sanctions. Therefore, whether Russian intervention were limited to the Donbass or went further to put pressure on the West for the status of the Ukraine, the price to pay would be the same. This is what he explained in his speech on February 21.

On that day, he agreed to the request of the Duma and recognized the independence of the two Donbass Republics and, at the same time, he signed friendship and assistance treaties with them.

The Ukrainian artillery bombardment of the Donbass population continued, and, on 23 February, the two Republics asked for military assistance from Russia. On 24 February, Vladimir Putin invoked Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which provides for mutual military assistance in the framework of a defensive alliance.

In order to make the Russian intervention totally illegal in the eyes of the public we deliberately hid the fact that the war actually started on February 16. The Ukrainian army was preparing to attack the Donbass as early as 2021, as some Russian and European intelligence services were well aware. Jurists will judge.

In his speech of February 24, Vladimir Putin stated the two objectives of his operation: “demilitarize” and “denazify” the Ukraine. So, it is not a question of taking over the Ukraine, nor even, presumably, of occupying it; and certainly not of destroying it.

From then on, our visibility on the course of the operation is limited: the Russians have an excellent security of operations (OPSEC) and the details of their planning are not known. But fairly quickly, the course of the operation allows us to understand how the strategic objectives were translated on the operational level.

Demilitarization:

- ground destruction of Ukrainian aviation, air defense systems and reconnaissance assets;
- neutralization of command and intelligence structures (C3I), as well as the main logistical routes in the depth of the territory;
- encirclement of the bulk of the Ukrainian army massed in the southeast of the country.

Denazification:

- destruction or neutralization of volunteer battalions operating in the cities of Odessa, Kharkov, and Mariupol, as well as in various facilities in the territory.

2. Demilitarization

The Russian offensive was carried out in a very “classic” manner. Initially—as the Israelis had done in 1967—with the destruction on the ground of the air force in the very first hours. Then, we witnessed a simultaneous progression along several axes according to the principle of “flowing water”: advance everywhere where resistance was weak and leave the cities (very demanding in terms of troops) for later. In the north, the Chernobyl power plant was occupied immediately to prevent acts of sabotage. The images of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers guarding the plant together are of course not shown.

The idea that Russia is trying to take over Kiev, the capital, to eliminate Zelensky, comes typically from the West—that is what they did in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and what they wanted to do in Syria with the help of the Islamic State. But Vladimir Putin never intended to shoot or topple Zelensky. Instead, Russia seeks to keep him in power by pushing him to negotiate, by surrounding Kiev. Up till now, he had refused to implement the Minsk Agreements. But now the Russians want to obtain the neutrality of the Ukraine.

Many Western commentators were surprised that the Russians continued to seek a negotiated solution while conducting military operations. The explanation lies in the Russian strategic outlook since the Soviet era. For the West, war begins when politics ends. However, the Russian approach follows a Clausewitzian inspiration: war is the continuity of politics and one can move fluidly from one to the other, even during combat. This allows one to create pressure on the adversary and push him to negotiate.

From an operational point of view, the Russian offensive was an example of its kind: in six days, the Russians seized a territory as large as the United Kingdom, with a speed of advance greater than what the Wehrmacht had achieved in 1940.

The bulk of the Ukrainian army was deployed in the south of the country in preparation for a major operation against the Donbass. This is why Russian forces were able to encircle it from the beginning of March in the “cauldron” between Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and Severodonetsk, with a thrust from the East through Kharkov and another from the South from Crimea. Troops from the Donetsk (DPR) and Lugansk (LPR) Republics are complementing the Russian forces with a push from the East.

At this stage, Russian forces are slowly tightening the noose, but are no longer under time pressure. Their demilitarization goal is all but achieved and the remaining Ukrainian forces no longer have an operational and strategic command structure.

The “slowdown” that our “experts” attribute to poor logistics is only the consequence of having achieved their objectives. Russia does not seem to want to engage in an occupation of the entire Ukrainian territory. In fact, it seems that Russia is trying to limit its advance to the linguistic border of the country.

Our media speak of indiscriminate bombardments against the civilian population, especially in Kharkov, and Dantean images are broadcast in a loop. However, Gonzalo Lira, a Latin American who lives there, presents us with a calm city on March 10 and March 11. It is true that it is a large city and we do not see everything—but this seems to indicate that we are not in the total war that we are served continuously on our screens.

As for the Donbass Republics, they have “liberated” their own territories and are fighting in the city of Mariupol.

3. Denazification

In cities like Kharkov, Mariupol and Odessa, the defense is provided by paramilitary militias. They know that the objective of “denazification” is aimed primarily at them.

For an attacker in an urbanized area, civilians are a problem. This is why Russia is seeking to create humanitarian corridors to empty cities of civilians and leave only the militias, to fight them more easily.

Conversely, these militias seek to keep civilians in the cities in order to dissuade the Russian army from fighting there. This is why they are reluctant to implement these corridors and do everything to ensure that Russian efforts are unsuccessful—they can use the civilian population as “human shields. Videos showing civilians trying to leave Mariupol and beaten up by fighters of the Azov regiment are of course carefully censored here.

On Facebook, the Azov group was considered in the same category as the Islamic State and subject to the platform’s “policy on dangerous individuals and organizations.” It was therefore forbidden to glorify it, and “posts” that were favorable to it were systematically banned. But on February 24, Facebook changed its policy and allowed posts favorable to the militia. In the same spirit, in March, the platform authorized, in the former Eastern countries, calls for the murder of Russian soldiers and leaders. So much for the values that inspire our leaders, as we shall see.

Our media propagate a romantic image of popular resistance. It is this image that led the European Union to finance the distribution of arms to the civilian population. This is a criminal act. In my capacity as head of peacekeeping doctrine at the UN, I worked on the issue of civilian protection. We found that violence against civilians occurred in very specific contexts. In particular, when weapons are abundant and there are no command structures.

These command structures are the essence of armies: their function is to channel the use of force towards an objective. By arming citizens in a haphazard manner, as is currently the case, the EU is turning them into combatants, with the consequential effect of making them potential targets. Moreover, without command, without operational goals, the distribution of arms leads inevitably to settling of scores, banditry and actions that are more deadly than effective. War becomes a matter of emotions. Force becomes violence. This is what happened in Tawarga (Libya) from 11 to 13 August 2011, where 30,000 black Africans were massacred with weapons parachuted (illegally) by France. By the way, the British Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (RUSI) does not see any added value in these arms deliveries.

Moreover, by delivering arms to a country at war, one exposes oneself to being considered a belligerent. The Russian strikes of March 13, 2022, against the Mykolayev air base follow Russian warnings that arms shipments would be treated as hostile targets.

The EU is repeating the disastrous experience of the Third Reich in the final hours of the Battle of Berlin. War must be left to the military and when one side has lost, it must be admitted. And if there is to be resistance, it must be led and structured. But we are doing exactly the opposite—we are pushing citizens to go and fight and at the same time, Facebook authorizes calls for the murder of Russian soldiers and leaders. So much for the values that inspire us.

Some intelligence services see this irresponsible decision as a way to use the Ukrainian population as cannon fodder to fight Vladimir Putin's Russia. This kind of murderous decision should have been left to the colleagues of Ursula von der Leyen's grandfather. It would have been better to engage in negotiations and thus obtain guarantees for the civilian population than to add fuel to the fire. It is easy to be combative with the blood of others.

4. The Maternity Hospital At Mariupol

It is important to understand beforehand that it is not the Ukrainian army that is defending Marioupol, but the Azov militia, composed of foreign mercenaries.

In its March 7, 2022 summary of the situation, the Russian UN mission in New York stated that "Residents report that Ukrainian armed forces expelled staff from

the Mariupol city birth hospital No. 1 and set up a firing post inside the facility.”

On March 8, the independent Russian media Lenta.ru, published the testimony of civilians from Marioupol who told that the maternity hospital was taken over by the militia of the Azov regiment, and who drove out the civilian occupants by threatening them with their weapons. They confirmed the statements of the Russian ambassador a few hours earlier.

The hospital in Mariupol occupies a dominant position, perfectly suited for the installation of anti-tank weapons and for observation. On 9 March, Russian forces struck the building. According to CNN, 17 people were wounded, but the images do not show any casualties in the building and there is no evidence that the victims mentioned are related to this strike. There is talk of children, but in reality, there is nothing. This may be true, but it may not be true. This does not prevent the leaders of the EU from seeing this as a war crime. And this allows Zelensky to call for a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

In reality, we do not know exactly what happened. But the sequence of events tends to confirm that Russian forces struck a position of the Azov regiment and that the maternity ward was then free of civilians.

The problem is that the paramilitary militias that defend the cities are encouraged by the international community not to respect the customs of war. It seems that the Ukrainians have replayed the scenario of the Kuwait City maternity hospital in 1990, which was totally staged by the firm Hill & Knowlton for \$10.7 million in order to convince the United Nations Security Council to intervene in Iraq for Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

Western politicians have accepted civilian strikes in the Donbass for eight years, without adopting any sanctions against the Ukrainian government. We have long since entered a dynamic where Western politicians have agreed to sacrifice international law towards their goal of weakening Russia.

Part Three: Conclusions

As an ex-intelligence professional, the first thing that strikes me is the total absence of Western intelligence services in the representation of the situation over the past year. In Switzerland, the services have been criticized for not having provided a correct picture of the situation. In fact, it seems that throughout the Western world, intelligence services have been overwhelmed by the politicians. The problem is that it is the politicians who decide—the best intelligence service in the world is useless if the decision-maker does not listen. This is what happened during this crisis.

That said, while some intelligence services had a very accurate and rational picture of the situation, others clearly had the same picture as that propagated by our media. In this crisis, the services of the countries of the “new Europe” played an important role. The problem is that, from experience, I have found them to be extremely bad at the analytical level—doctrinaire, they lack the intellectual and political independence necessary to assess a situation with military “quality.” It is better to have them as enemies than as friends.

Second, it seems that in some European countries, politicians have deliberately ignored their services in order to respond ideologically to the situation. That is why this crisis has been irrational from the beginning. It should be noted that all the documents that were presented to the public during this crisis were presented by politicians based on commercial sources.

Some Western politicians obviously wanted there to be a conflict. In the United States, the attack scenarios presented by Anthony Blinken to the Security Council were only the product of the imagination of a **Tiger Team** working for him—he did exactly as Donald Rumsfeld did in 2002, who had thus “bypassed” the CIA and other intelligence services that were much less assertive about Iraqi chemical weapons.

The dramatic developments we are witnessing today have causes that we knew about but refused to see:

- on the strategic level, the expansion of NATO (which we have not dealt with here);
- on the political level, the Western refusal to implement the Minsk Agreements;
- and operationally, the continuous and repeated attacks on the civilian population of the Donbass over the past years and the dramatic increase in late February 2022.

In other words, we can naturally deplore and condemn the Russian attack. But WE (that is: the United States, France and the European Union in the lead) have created the conditions for a conflict to break out. We show compassion for the Ukrainian people and the **two million** refugees. That is fine. But if we had had a modicum of compassion for the same number of refugees from the **Ukrainian populations** of Donbass massacred by their own government and who sought refuge in Russia for eight years, none of this would probably have happened.

Civilian casualties caused by active hostilities in 2018-2021, per territory

	In territory control- led by the self-pro- claimed “Republics”	In Government- controlled territory	In “no man’s land”	Total	Decrease compared with previous year, per cent
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2018	128	27	7	162	41.9
2019	85	18	2	105	35.2
2020	61	9	0	70	33.3
2021	36	8	0	44	37.1
Total	310	62	9	381	
Per cent	81.4	16.3	2.3	100.0	

As we can see, more than 80% of the victims in Donbass were the result of the Ukrainian army's shelling. For years, the West remained silent about the massacre of Russian-speaking Ukrainians by the government of Kiev, without ever trying to bring pressure on Kiev. It is this silence that forced the Russian side to act. [Source: "Conflict-related civilian casualties," United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.]

Whether the term "genocide" applies to the abuses suffered by the people of Donbass is an open question. The term is generally reserved for cases of greater magnitude (Holocaust, etc.). But the definition given by the [Genocide Convention](#) is probably broad enough to apply to this case. Legal scholars will understand this.

Clearly, this conflict has led us into hysteria. Sanctions seem to have become the preferred tool of our foreign policies. If we had insisted that Ukraine abide by the Minsk Agreements, which we had negotiated and endorsed, none of this would have happened. Vladimir Putin's condemnation is also ours. There is no point in whining afterwards—we should have acted earlier. However, neither Emmanuel Macron (as guarantor and member of the UN Security Council), nor Olaf Scholz, nor Volodymyr Zelensky have respected their commitments. In the end, the real defeat is that of those who have no voice.

The European Union was unable to promote the implementation of the Minsk agreements—on the contrary, it did not react when Ukraine was bombing its own population in the Donbass. Had it done so, Vladimir Putin would not have needed to react. Absent from the diplomatic phase, the EU distinguished itself by fueling the conflict. On February 27, the Ukrainian government agreed to enter into negotiations with Russia. But a few hours later, the European Union voted a budget of 450 million euros to supply arms to the Ukraine, adding fuel to the fire. From then on, the Ukrainians felt that they did not need to reach an agreement. The resistance of the Azov militia in Mariupol even led to a boost of 500 million euros for weapons.

In the Ukraine, with the blessing of the Western countries, those who are in favor of a negotiation have been eliminated. This is the case of Denis Kireyev, one of the Ukrainian negotiators, assassinated on March 5 by the Ukrainian secret service (SBU) because he was too favorable to Russia and was considered a traitor. The same fate befell Dmitry Demyanenko, former deputy head of the SBU's main directorate for Kiev and its region, who was assassinated on March 10 because he was too favorable to an agreement with Russia—he was shot by the Mirotvorets (“Peacemaker”) militia. This militia is associated with the Mirotvorets website, which lists the “enemies of Ukraine,” with their personal data, addresses and telephone numbers, so that they can be harassed or even eliminated; a practice that is punishable in many countries, but not in the Ukraine. The UN and some European countries have demanded the closure of this site—refused by the Rada.

In the end, the price will be high, but Vladimir Putin will likely achieve the goals he set for himself. His ties with Beijing have solidified. China is emerging as a mediator in the conflict, while Switzerland is joining the list of Russia's enemies. The Americans have to ask Venezuela and Iran for oil to get out of the energy impasse they have put themselves in—Juan Guaido is leaving the scene for good and the United States has to piteously backtrack on the sanctions imposed on its enemies.

Western ministers who seek to collapse the Russian economy and make the Russian people suffer, or even call for the assassination of Putin, show (even if they have partially reversed the form of their words, but not the substance!) that our leaders are no better than those we hate—for sanctioning Russian athletes in the Para-Olympic Games or Russian artists has nothing to do with fighting Putin.

Thus, we recognize that Russia is a democracy since we consider that the Russian people are responsible for the war. If this is not the case, then why do we seek to punish a whole population for the fault of one? Let us remember that collective punishment is forbidden by the Geneva Conventions.

The lesson to be learned from this conflict is our sense of variable geometric humanity. If we cared so much about peace and the Ukraine, why didn't we encourage the Ukraine to respect the agreements it had signed and that the members of the Security Council had approved?

The integrity of the media is measured by their willingness to work within the terms of the Munich Charter. They succeeded in propagating hatred of the Chinese during the Covid crisis and their polarized message leads to the same effects against the Russians. Journalism is becoming more and more unprofessional and militant.

As Goethe said: “The greater the light, the darker the shadow.” The more the sanctions against Russia are disproportionate, the more the cases where we have done nothing highlight our racism and servility. Why have no Western politicians reacted to the strikes against the civilian population of Donbass for eight years?

Because finally, what makes the conflict in the Ukraine more blameworthy than the war in Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya? What sanctions have we adopted against those who deliberately lied to the international community in order to wage unjust, unjustified and murderous wars? Have we sought to “make the American people suffer” for lying to us (because they are a democracy!) before the war in Iraq? Have we adopted a single sanction against the countries, companies or politicians who are supplying weapons to the conflict in Yemen, considered to be the “worst humanitarian disaster in the world?” Have we sanctioned the countries of the European Union that practice the most abject torture on their territory for the benefit of the United States?

To ask the question is to answer it... and the answer is not pretty.

Jacques Baud is a former colonel of the General Staff, ex-member of the Swiss strategic intelligence, specialist on Eastern countries. He was trained in the American and British intelligence services. He has served as Policy Chief for United Nations Peace Operations. As a UN expert on rule of law and security institutions, he designed and led the first multidimensional UN intelligence unit in the Sudan. He has worked for the African Union and was for 5 years responsible for the fight, at NATO, against the proliferation of small arms. He was involved in discussions with the highest Russian military and intelligence officials just after the fall of the USSR. Within NATO, he followed the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and later participated in programs to assist the Ukraine. He is the author of several books on intelligence, war and terrorism, in particular Le Détournement published by SIGEST, Gouverner par les fake news, L'affaire Navalny. His latest book is Poutine, maître du jeu? published by Max Milo.

This article appears through the gracious courtesy of Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement, Paris. Translated from the French by N. Dass.

Featured image: “Capitulation,” by Petr Krivonogov, painted in 1946.